Morse Telegraph Club, Inc.

Western Union "92" and Railroad Manual Block Codes

92 Code

[The "92 Code" was first adopted by Western Union in 1859. This is not an "official" version, if there is such a thing, but is taken chiefly from The Telegraph Instructor[1] *by G.M. Dodge; some are from the late Dr. E. Stuart Davis. Some railroad company variations are shown in italics.]*

WIRE—preference over everything except 95.

1. Wait a minute.
2. Very important.
3. What time is it? *"OS," or train report*
4. Where shall I go ahead?
5. Have you business for me?
6. I am ready.
7. Are you ready?
8. Close your key, stop breaking.
9. Priority business. Wire Chief's call, Postal Telegraph Co. *Ask for train orders; clear the line for train orders.*
10. Keep this circuit closed.
12. Do you understand?
13. I understand.
14. What is the weather?
15. For you and others to copy.
17. Lightning here.
18. What's the trouble?
19. Form 19 train order.
21. Stop for meal.
22. Wire test.
23. All stations copy.
24. Repeat this back.
25. Busy on another wire.
26. Put on ground wire
27. Priority, very important.
28. Do you get my writing?
29. Private, deliver in sealed envelope.
30. No more—the end.
31. Form 31 train order.
32. I understand that I am to....
33. Answer is paid. *Car report.*
34. Message for all officers.
35. You may use my signal to answer this.
37. Inform all interested. *Diversion message.*
39. Important, with priority on thru wire. *Sleeping car report.*
44. Answer promptly by wire.
55. Important.
73. Best regards.
77. I have a message for you.
88. Love and kisses.
91. Superintendent's signal.
92. Deliver promptly.
93. Vice President and General Manager's signals.
95. President's signal.
134. Who is at the key?

[1] 4th and revised edition, Valparaiso, Ind. 1908

Variations are many. *The Twentieth Century Manual of Railway Commercial and Wireless Telegraphy*[2] by Frederic L. Meyer lists 29 as "Train orders." Meyer also shows 23 as "Accident or death message" and 73 as "Accept my compliments" (the original phrasing). Lake Erie & Western Railroad's 1921 rule book shows "21" as "emergency."

Following is the version found on pages 68 and 69 of *Wood's Plan of Telegraphic Instruction*, published in 1864 by Morse's Telegraphic Institute, Syracuse, N.Y. This table differs considerably from the 92 code; interestingly, is not so designated but entitled "Telegraphic Numerals."

1. Wait a moment.
2. Give precise standard time.[3]
3. Get immediate answer from_____
4. Where shall I go ahead?
5. Keep still.
6. I am ready.
7. Don't know.
8. Busy on other line.
9. Get answer, sure, and quick.
10. Has_____train reached your station?
11. Did you get my last?
12. What time did_____train leave your station?
13. Report when_____train leaves your station.
14. Write more firmly.
15. Separate words more.
16. What is the weather?
17. Very important — hurry up.
18. What is the trouble?
19. How many cars has_____train?
20. I will see.
21. Collect special messenger's charges for delivery, which are guaranteed.
22. Paid here.
23. Message for all offices.
24. Have you anything for me?
25. Write dots.
26. Write alphabet.
27. Take off ground wire.
28. Do you get me?
29. Report special messenger's charges, to be paid here.
30. Finis
31. How do you understand my last message?
32. I understand that_____.
33. Deliver this only to whom addressed.
34. If statement ready, go ahead.
35. Connect wires through straight.
36. Require correspondent to prepay answer.
37. If correspondent will prepay answer it will be paid here.
43. Answer will be paid here.
73. Compliments to _____.

[2] Rand McNally & Co., 7th Ed.d 1914

[3] This would refer to a company's own time standard. The Congressionally-mandated Standard Time system was not adopted until 1883.

The authors add, *These numerals comprise, it is believed, all in common use; the above are those employed upon most lines; whenever they differ from those in use, operators will find it advantageous to adopt these, as numerals frequently follow messages through several circuits.*

Railroad Manual Block System Communicating Code

Original reading adopted by the Association of American Railroads, April 25, 1900:

1—Display Stop-signal. Answer by SD or 5.
2—Block clear. Answer by 13.
3—Block wanted. Answer by 2 or 5.
4—Train has entered block. Answer by 13.
5—Block is not clear.
7—Train following.
8—Opening block station Answer by Nos. of trains in the extended block with time each train entered block.
9—Closing block station. Answer by "13" after receiving transfer of the records of trains which are in the extended block.
13. I understand.
71—Train following. Display stop signal. Answer by SD.

Note. — Additional signals may be used if desired. The signals prescribed under the Controlled Manual Block Signal System should be used for such additional signals wherever applicable.

Amended form, adopted May 19, 1909:

1—Display Stop-signal.

13—I understand.
17—Display Stop-signal. Train following.
2—Block Clear.
3—Block wanted for train other than passenger.
36—Block wanted for passenger train.
4—Train other than passenger has entered block.
46—Passenger train has entered block.
5—Block is not clear of train other than passenger.
56—Block is not clear of passenger train.
7—Train following.
8—Opening block station. Answer by record of trains in the extended block.
9—Closing block station. Answer by 13. If the block is not clear, to be answered by 5 or 56.

Note To Rule 316.—Additions to the communicating code may be made if desired. When the telephone is used the code will be used without the numerals.

Other amended forms were adopted Nov. 17, 1915, Jan. 17, 1928 and Nov. 15, 1938.

After World War II on the Peoria & Eastern Railway (leased by the CCC&StL which in turn was leased by the New York Central) it was common usage to ask "1" to obtain a block for a passenger train and "3" for a train other than passenger. When a train entered the block the admitting operator would simply send, "2nd 90 in 837," omitting the 4 or 46.

This seemed to have been local usage, as elsewhere on the Big Four more orthodox procedure was followed.

To illustrate how AAR rules could be modified "where proper safe-guards are provided," here is the manual block code of the Illinois Terminal Railroad (former Alton & Eastern lines) from timetable No. 42, February 18, 1953:

13—I understand
17—Display stop signal. Train following.
2—Block clear
3—Block wanted for other than passenger train.
36—Block wanted for passenger train.
4—Train other than passenger has entered block.
46—Passenger train has entered block.
5—Block is not clear of train other than passenger.
56—Block is not clear of passenger train.
7—Train following.

Operating a manual block system by telegraphy was faster than using a telephone. Many roads had dedicated two-station "block wires" between adjacent offices; some of these used dry cells, instead of crowsfoot batteries, and 3-terminal U.J. Fry keys. These lines were dead until one operator opened his key, which applied battery to the line.

Since there could be only one other office on these wires, office calls were uneccessary. An operator wanting a block would just open the key and request:

3 R EX 2912 W *(Block wanted for freight train Extra 2912 West).*

If the other operator was on the job (and on busy districts he'd better be) he'd give the appropriate response — 2 R EX 2912 W if the block was clear — and that concluded the exchange.

When the train entered the block, the admitting operator would simply say:

4 EX 2912 W 1022. (a.m. or p.m. was not generally used.)

Usually the other operator's only acknowledgment would be a terse "I" (shorthand for "aye").

Even when through wires were used and office calls were necessary, Morse was faster than phone.

SU KG 1 R 12 *(Farmer City, this is Dean. Block wanted for passenger train No. 12).*

SU 2 R 12 *(Farmer City here; block is clear for No. 12).*

Train Order Abbreviations

[This example from the 1909 rule book of the Chicago & Alton R.R.]

Initials for the signature of the Superintendent (or other designated official, such as the Chief Dispatcher).
Such office and other signals as are arranged by the Superintendent.
C&E—For Conductor and Engineman.
"X"—Train will be held until order is made "complete."
Com.—For complete.
O S—Train report.
No—For Number.
Eng—For engine.
Sec—For section.
Psgr—For Passenger.
Frt—For Freight.
Mins—For Minutes.
Jct—For Junction.
Dispr—For Dispatcher.
Opr—For Operator.
31 or 19—To clear the line for Train Orders and for Operators to ask for Train Orders.
S D—For "Stop Displayed."
The usual abbreviations for the names of the months and stations.

Weather Report Code

[From the telegraph display in the restored St. Louis Union Station]

Train dispatchers were required to keep a record of weather conditions on their districts and some roads used the reporting code below. At designated times or on request from the dispatcher (Wea?) operators responded with the temperature and appropriate letters—e.g., 56 KQ.

A - Light Snow
B - Heavy Snow
C - Drifting Snow
D - Light Fog
F - Heavy Fog
G - Light Rain
H - Heavy Rain
J - Heavy Wind
K - Calm
N - Sleeting
Q - Clear
R - Cloudy

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